

Carnahan Brings Home Groceries

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Of the Suburban Journals

The death of Chuck Campbell's daughter in a car accident spurred him to join a task force that has brought attention to one of the county's dangerous roads.

That task force's action may bring federal money to help fix the road.

Campbell's daughter Mindy became one of 17 fatalities recorded on Highway MM in the past 10 years when the driver of the car she was riding in lost control after hitting an ice patch. She was 16 when she died on Jan. 5, 2004.

After the accident Campbell became a member of the Highway MM/W Task Force, a group devoted to bringing awareness and funds to eventually relocate the road.

He and other task force members were present at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis Monday when U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-St. Louis, announced the U.S. House of Representatives had approved \$52.5 million in road improvements for Carnahan's 3rd Congressional District, which includes Jefferson County.

The bill is now up for debate in the U.S. Senate. It has to be approved by the Senate and signed by the president to become reality.

More than \$22 million of those funds would go toward road improvements in Jefferson County. A Route MM project would get the bulk of the money, \$17.18 million, and a Highway 21 project would get \$5 million.

"When I look at my own house and make my budget at home, I make priorities," Campbell said. "The first is groceries because I have to feed my family. The second is rent and utilities and the

last are things like satellite TV. I think more focus needs to be getting the groceries to be our streets . . . we need to focus on saving lives. My challenge for our legislators is to bring the groceries home."

Carnahan is trying to do that. A freshman congressman, Carnahan made it a priority to get on the House Transportation Committee.

He said that appointment helped bring more money to the area because committee members can designate almost four and half times the amount of transportation funding for their districts than nonmembers.

"A member of Congress who is not on the transportation committee has been able to designate \$15 million for their district," Carnahan said. "By being able to be on this committee, I was able to designate \$52.5 million for my district. It really makes a difference and we will be able to address some serious issues."

The bill has money earmarked for the entire St. Louis region. Two of the main projects outside of Jefferson County include improvements to Hanley Road south of Highway 40 and the construction of a new interchange at I-55 and Weber Road.

But the two Jefferson County projects make up 42 percent of the area's allotment. All three county commissioners attended the announcement along with the Highway MM/W Task Force members.

The MM improvements would involve relocating and improving a section of the road by Sycamore Springs and Duda Road. The Highway 21 funding would go toward the expansion to four lanes through Hillsboro. "Reader's Digest" has called Highway 21 one of the five most deadly roads in the country.

"I think it is remarkable that a freshman congressman has done what he's been able to do," said Ed Kemp, 1st District Commissioner. "I think his accomplishments bode well for the future of the St. Louis and Jefferson County area."

"Anytime we can get any help at all federally to help the roads in Jefferson County it is outstanding," said Presiding Commissioner Mark Mertens. "I'd love to see it come."

So would Highway MM/W Task Force members. Task Force chair Conrad Smith was especially pleased that the improvements include a relocation of the entire road.

"MM is still nothing more than the wagon trail that it was in the 1800s," Smith said. "You can't change it. We need a new highway to get the traffic off of there."

The \$17.18 million is exactly the amount needed to start the improvements. Campbell and other Task Force members shared Smith's smile after the announcement.

"We love it," Smith said. "We've been fighting for seven years for this and (Carnahan) is finally bringing the groceries home to us."